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SRI VENKATESWARA

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Sri Venkateswara (or Bala ji) is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. When sage Narada expressed concern regarding the deterioration of human values in Kali-Yuga, Brahma, the Creator, told him that only Lord Vishnu, the Preserver of Creation, could save a wayward suffering mankind. But the problem was how to ask Vishnu to leave Vaikuntha, his abode, and take upon an incarnation to descend to Bhooloka, the Earth. The events that led to Vishnu dwelling in the sacred Tirumala hills in the Southern India, as Srinivasa, is the saga of Sri Venkateswara. The Tirumala hills are also known as the Venkataadri hills, for the dweller on the Venkataadri is Sri Venkateswara. "Ven" in Sanskrit means sin and 'kata' that which burns. Hence the devotees believe that even a visit to the holy Venkataadri hills can bring peace and salvation to mankind in Kali-Yuga.

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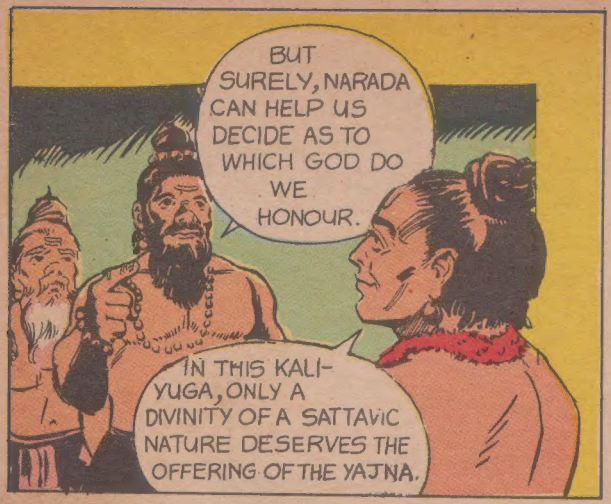
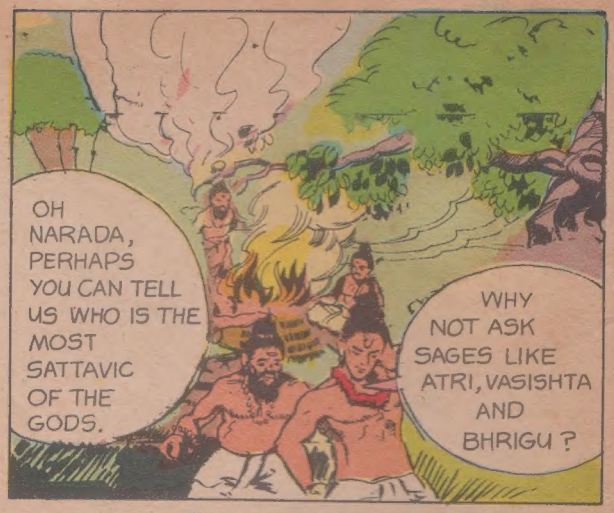
SRI VENKATESWARA

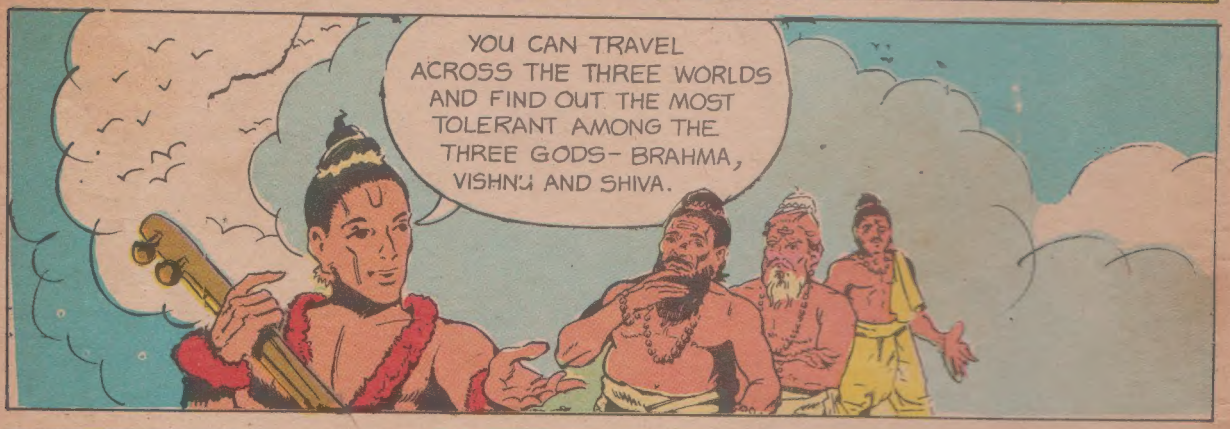
ONCE UPON A TIME, THE GREAT RISHIS OF YORE, GOT TOGETHER AT NYMISARANYA,* TO PERFORM A GREAT YAJNA** FOR THE WELFARE OF MANKIND.

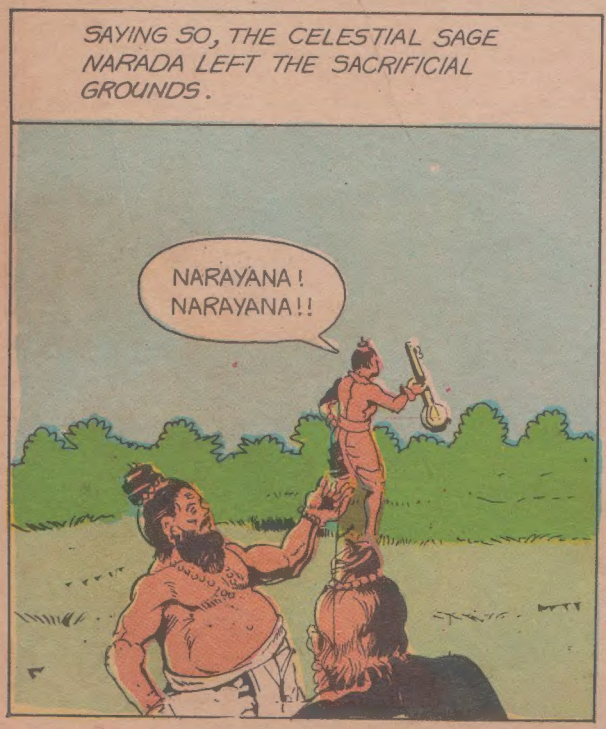
AS THE PREPARATIONS WERE ON, SAGE NARADA VISITED THE SITE –

* FOREST ABODE OF RISHIS **RITUAL SACRIFICE


BUT SURELY, NARADA CAN HELP US DECIDE AS TO WHICH GOD DO WE HONOUR.
IN THIS KALI-YUGA, ONLY A DIVINITY OF A SATTAVIC NATURE DESERVES THE OFFERING OF THE YAJNA.

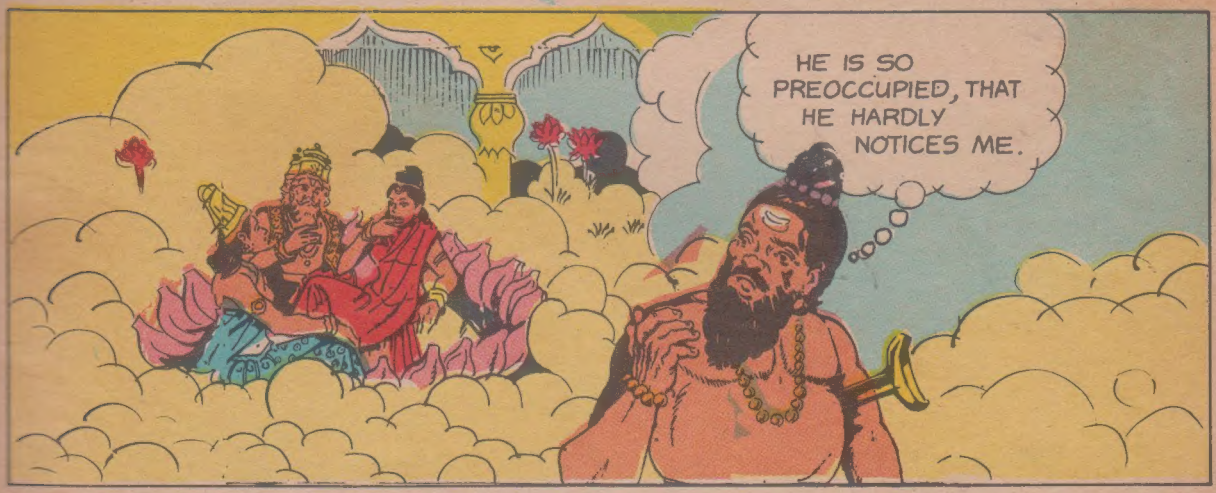

OH NARADA, PERHAPS YOU CAN TELL US WHO IS THE MOST SATTAVIC OF THE GODS.
WHY NOT ASK SAGES LIKE ATRI, VASISHTA AND BHRIGU ?

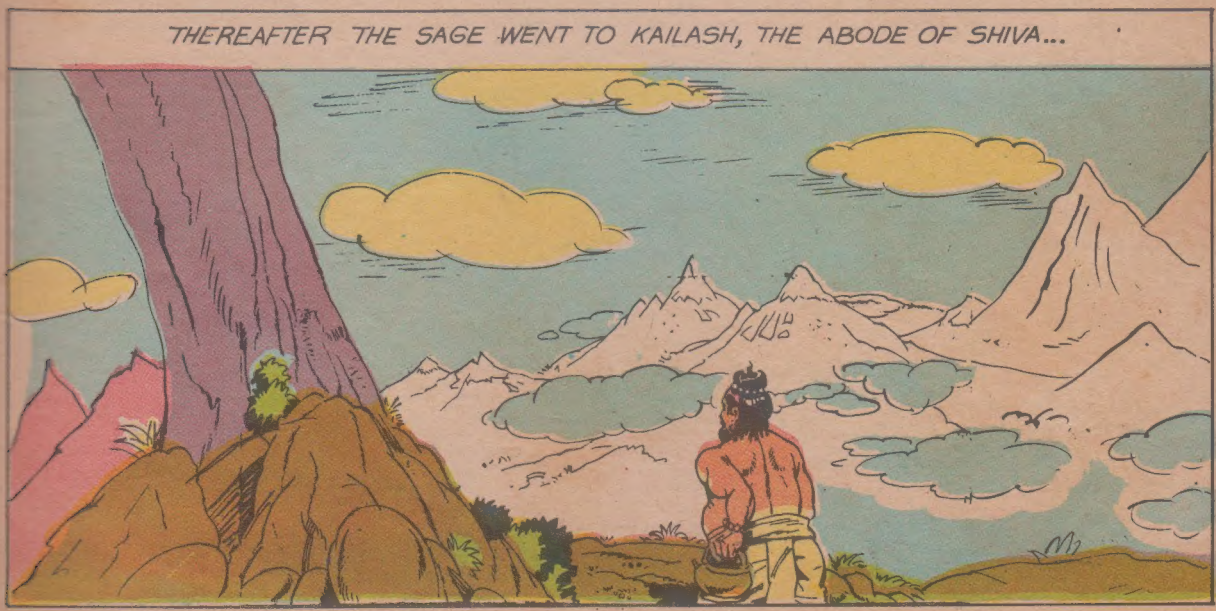

YOU CAN TRAVEL ACROSS THE THREE WORLDS AND FIND OUT THE MOST TOLERANT AMONG THE THREE GODS- BRAHMA, VISHNU AND SHIVA.


SAYING SO, THE CELESTIAL SAGE NARADA LEFT THE SACRIFICIAL GROUNDS.
NARAYANA ! NARAYANA !!

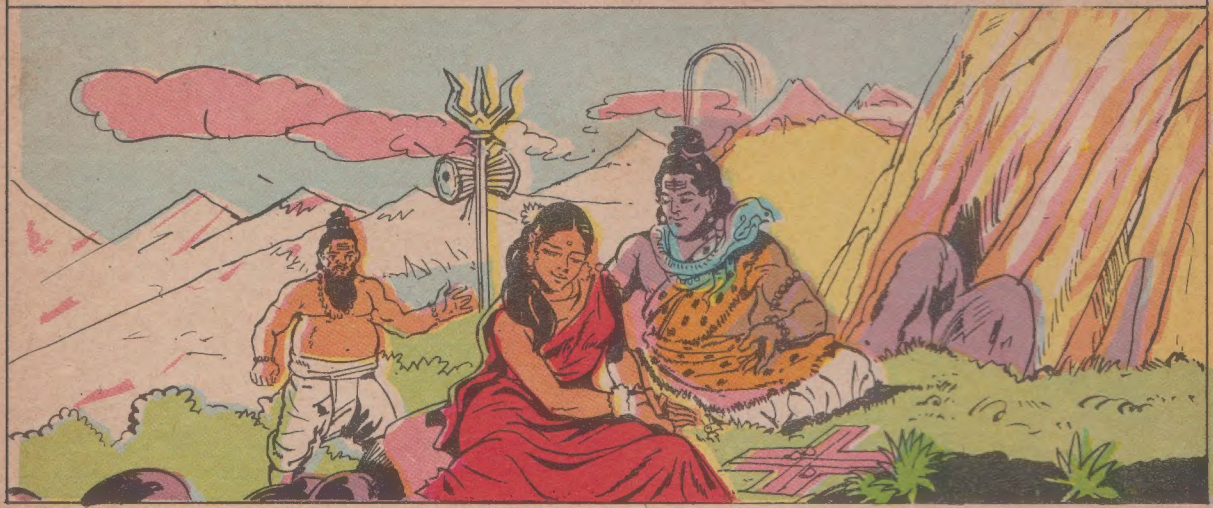
THE RISHIS WERE HESITANT, BUT SAGE BHRIGU AGREED TO UNDERTAKE THE GREAT JOURNEY.

BHRIGU VISITED SATYALOKA, THE WORLD OF BRAHMA, AND FOUND BRAHMA ABSORBED IN RELIGIOUS DISCUSSION WITH SARASWATI, HIS CONSORT, AND OTHER DEVAS.

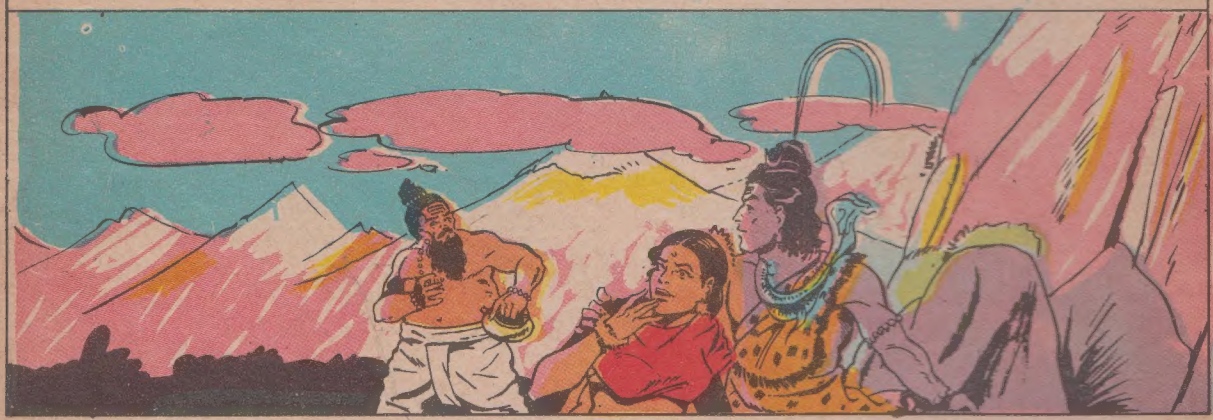

HE IS SO PREOCCUPIED, THAT HE HARDLY NOTICES ME.


THEREAFTER THE SAGE WENT TO KAILASH, THE ABODE OF SHIVA...

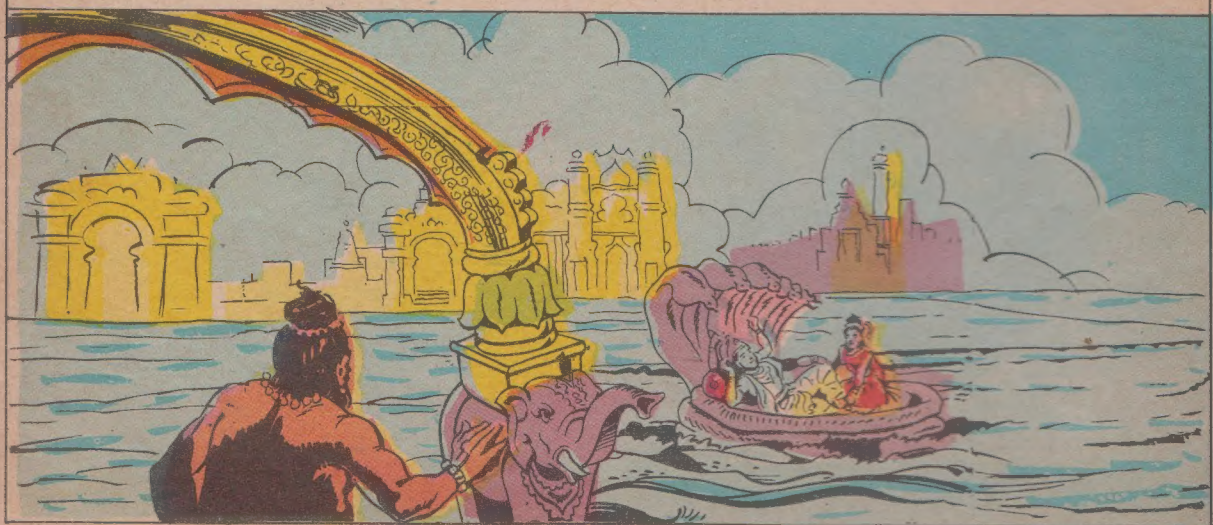
...WHERE HE FOUND THE GOD SPORTING WITH HIS CONSORT PARVATI.



BHRIGU SAW A TINGE OF IRRITATION ON SHIVA'S FACE, AND DECIDED TO RETIRE.

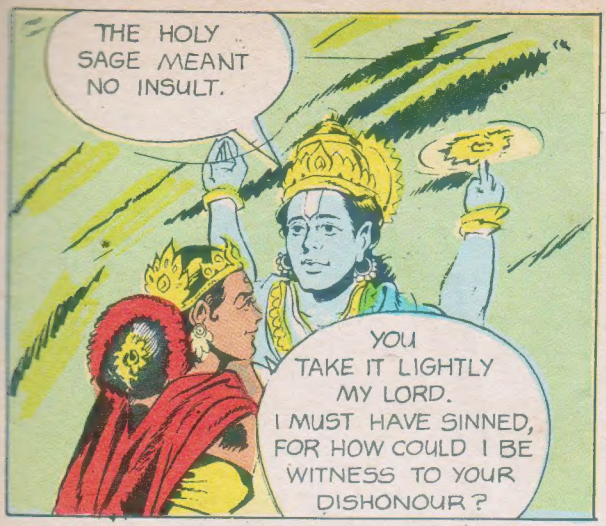


NEXT, HE VISITED VAIKUNTHA, THE HEAVENLY ABODE OF LORD VISHNU.

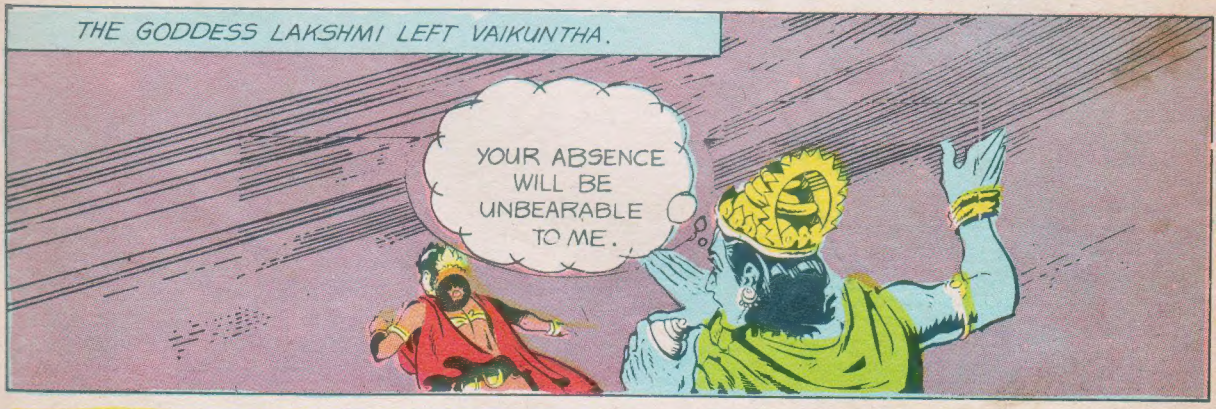


BHRIGU SAW VISHNU, RECLINING IN SOUND SLUMBER, WITH HIS CONSORT LAKSHMI AT HIS FEET.
IN ANGER, THE SAGE KICKED THE GOD AWAKE.
LORD VISHNU AT ONCE UNDERSTOOD THE CAUSE OF BHRIGU'S RESENTMENT.
GREAT RISHI, YOUR TOUCH HAS BLESSED ME!
SURPRISED AT VISHNU'S REACTION, BHRIGU FILL UPON HIS KNEES.
SUPREME LORD! PARDON ME FOR MY RASH ACT
THE FAULT LIES WITH THE HOST WHO DOES NOT NOTICE THE ARRIVAL OF HIS GUEST.

YOUR FORGIVENESS AGAIN, LORD. THE OBJECT OF MY VISIT IS FULFILLED.
BHRIGU RETURNED TO EARTH AND NARRATED TO THE OTHER RISHIS ABOUT HIS JOURNEY TO THE THREE WORLDS.
VISHNU WAS ELECTED THE PRESIDING DEITY OF THEIR YAJNA AND THE CEREMONIES BEGAN DEVOUTLY.
AT VAIKUNTHA, WHEREAS VISHNU UNDERSTOOD THE PLAY OF MAYA IN THE VISIT OF BHRIGU, LAKSHMI FELT INSULTED.
HOW DARE A MERE MORTAL BEHAVE WITH YOU IN THIS MANNER ?

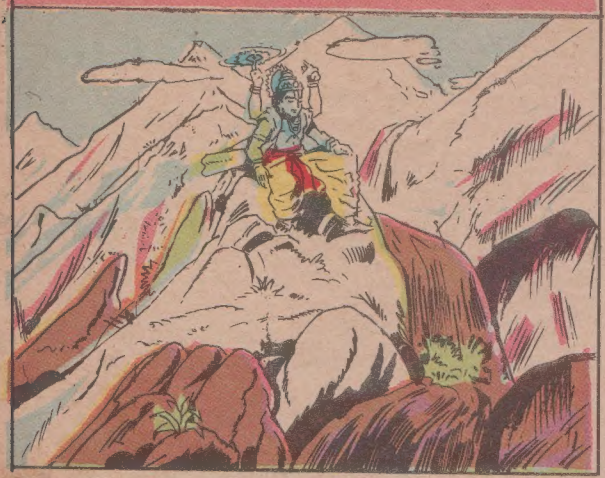

THE HOLY SAGE MEANT NO INSULT.
YOU TAKE IT LIGHTLY MY LORD. I MUST HAVE SINNED, FOR HOW COULD I BE WITNESS TO YOUR DISHONOUR?

LORD VISHNU FAILED TO PACIFY HIS ENRAGED SPOUSE...
I MUST DO PENANCE TO QUELL MY MIND'S TORMENT. PARDON ME, MY LORD, FOR I MUST LEAVE YOU AT ONCE.

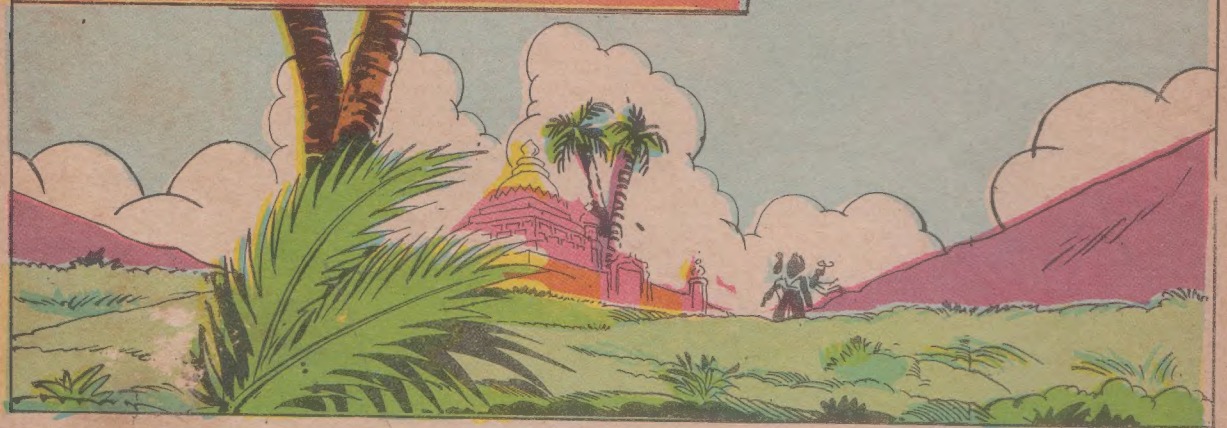

THE GODDESS LAKSHMI LEFT VAIKUNTHA.
YOUR ABSENCE WILL BE UNBEARABLE TO ME.

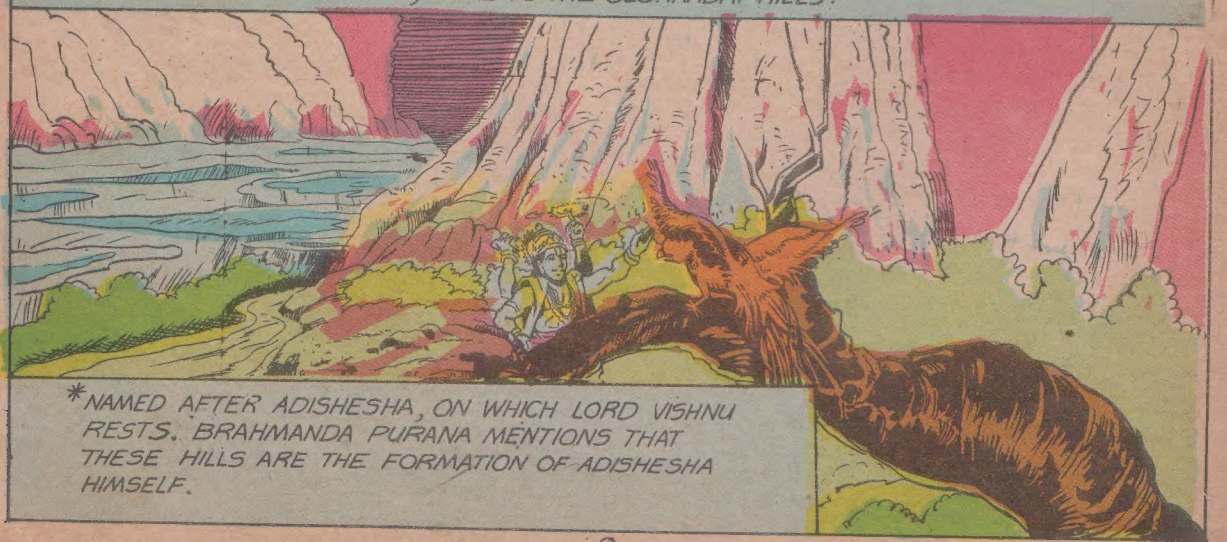
AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF LAKSHMI, VAIKUNTHA LOST ITS LUSTER. VISHNU, PAINED AT THE SEPERATION OF HIS BELOVED, SAT FORLORN AND DEJECTED.

HE LEFT VAIKUNTHA AND CAME TO EARTH.


HE VISITED THE HOLY GANGA...

...THE VINDHYA MOUNTAINS...


...AND CROSSED INTO THE DECCAN PLATEAU, BUT COULD FIND NO SOLACE ANYWHERE.


AFTER TRAVERSING HALF THE WORLD, VISHNU, AT LAST, CAME TO THE SESHAADRI HILLS*
*NAMED AFTER ADISHESHA, ON WHICH LORD VISHNU RESTS. BRAHMANDA PURANA MENTIONS THAT THESE HILLS ARE THE FORMATION OF ADISHESHA HIMSELF.

ON THE HILLS, LORD VISHNU CAME UPON THE COOK BANK OF THE LAKE, SWAMIPUSHKARNI.
HE SAT UNDER A HUGE TREE. A STRANGE FEELING OF PEACE CAME UPON HIM.
WILD DEER PLAYED NEAR THE LAKE, AND TREES HUMMED WITH BIRDS.
LORD VISHNU SAW A HUG ANT-HILL NEARBY, WITH A CAVE-LIKE ENTRANCE.
A FINE PLACE FOR MEDITATION.
THE SUPREME LORD SAT INSIDE THE ANT-HILL IN MEDITATION, FORGETTING ALL THOUGHT OF FOOD AND DRINK.

THE SEVER PENANCE OF VISHNU DISTURBED BRAHMA, SHIVA AND OTHER GODS.

BUT WHY HAS THIS HAPPENED?

OH BHOOLENATH,* THIS WAS JUST AN EXCUSE FOR LORD VISHNU TO GO TO BHOOLOKA, FOR THE WELFARE OF MANKIND.

BUT VISHNU HAS NO CARE FOR FOOD OR DRINK.

BRAHMA DEVISED A PLAN AND BECAME A COW WHILE SHIVA TOOK THE FORM OF ITS CALF. AND UPON SURYA'S** REQUEST, LAKSHMI TOOK THE FORM OF A YOUNG GIRL ESCORTING THE COW.

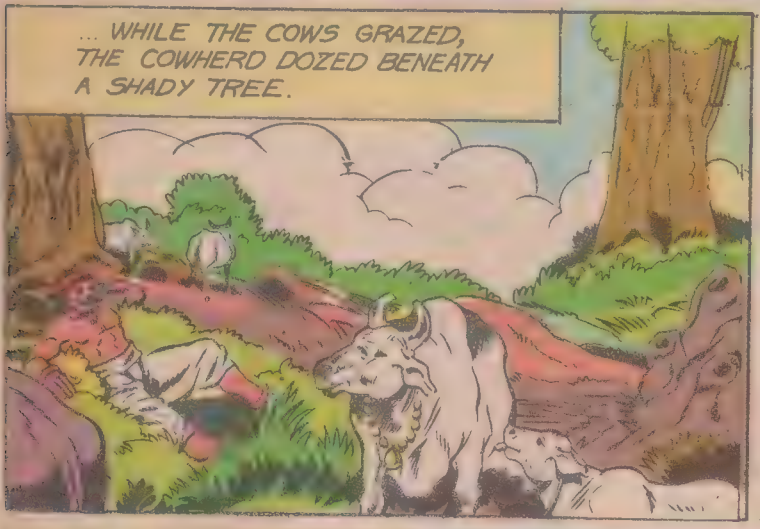
LAKSHMI TOOK THE COW TO THE CITY OF A CHOLA KING WHO RULED THE AREA OF THE SESHAADRI HILLS.

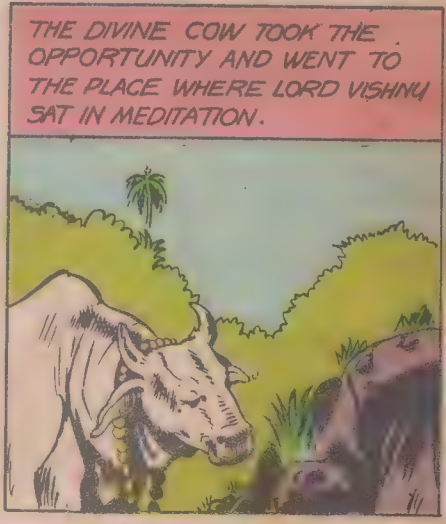
ACCORDING TO BRAHMA'S PLAN, THE KING PURCHASED THE COW AT A GRAND PRICE.

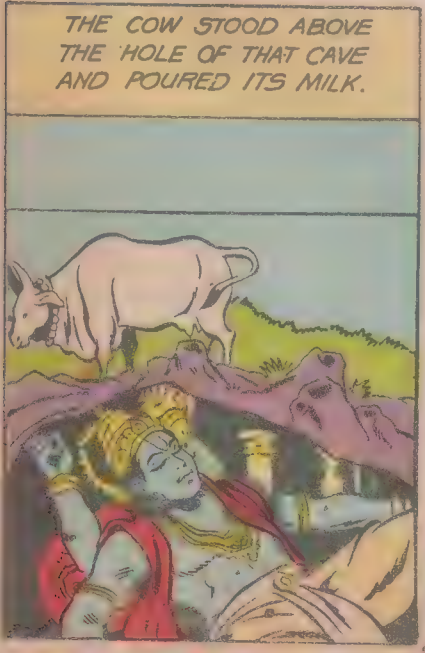
THE COW AND ITS CALF WERE ADDED TO THE ROYAL HERD.

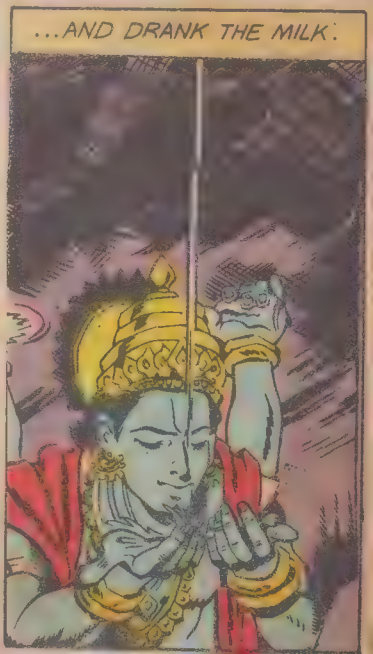
* AN EPITHET OF SHIVA ** SUN GOD

THE COWHERD OF THE PALACE USED TO TAKE THE HERD FOR GRAZING TO THE NEARBY SESHAADRI HILLS, AND...









THIS CONTINUED FOR A FEW DAYS BECAUSE OF WHICH THE COW WOULD NOT YIELD A SINGLE DROP OF MILK AT THE PALACE STABLES.

THE MILKMAIDS COMPLAINED TO THE QUEEN WHO SUMMONED THE COWHERD.

I AM INNOCENT. I DO NOT KNOW WHY THIS HEALTHY COW GIVES NO MILK. AND NO ONE MILKS THE COW IN SECRET.

FIND OUT THE TRUTH OR YOU WILL BE PUNISHED.

THE NEXT DAY THE COWHERD LED THE HERD TO THE SESHAADRI HILLS.

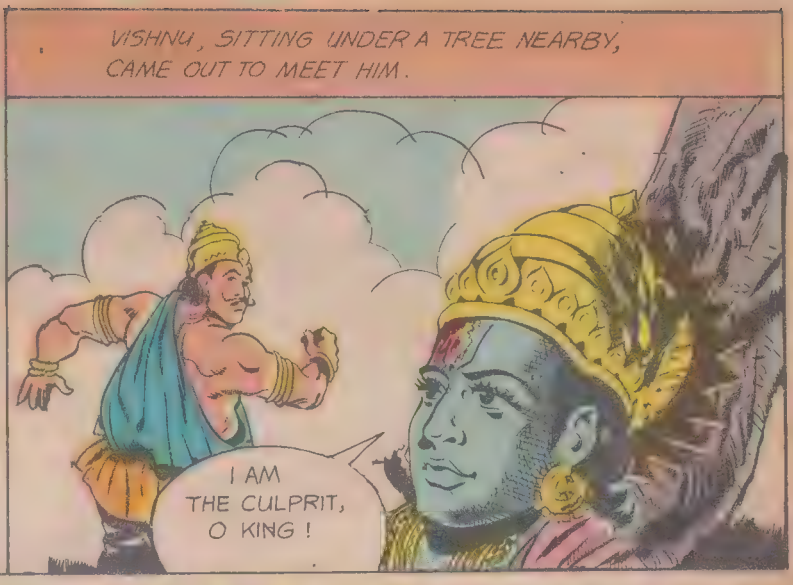
TODAY, I'LL KEEP AN EYE ON THAT COW.

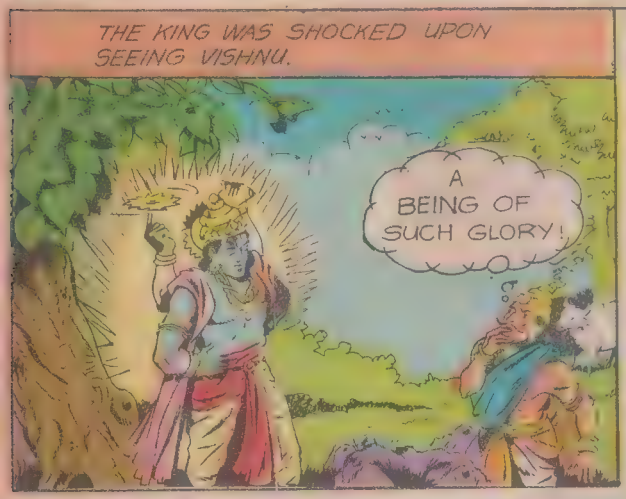
HE PRETENDED SLEEP AND NOTICED THE COW SLIP AWAY FROM THE HERD.

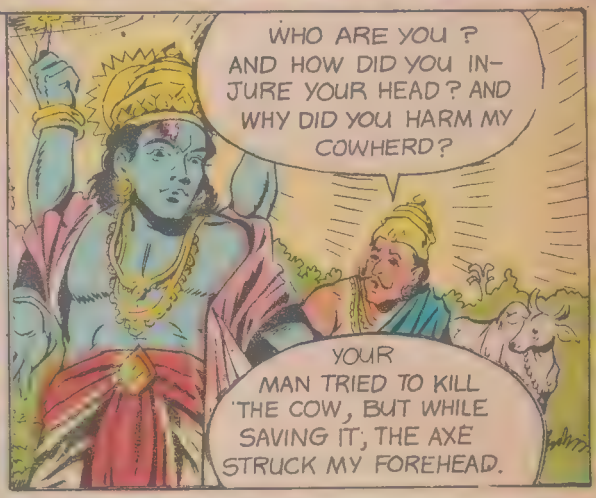
HE QUICKLY PICKED UP HIS AXE AND FOLLOWED THE COW.
THE COW, AS USUAL, POURED ITS MILK INTO THE CAVE.
IN ANGER THE COWHERD FLUNG HIS AXE AT THE COW.
LORD VISHNU SENSED THE DANGER TO THE COW AND QUICKLY ROSE UP FROM THE ANT HILL...
...AND CAUGHT THE AXE BEFORE IT COULD HARM THE COW, BUT NOT BEFORE THE WEAPON HAD CAUSED A DEEP WOUND ON HIS HEAD.
UPON SEEING VISHNU, THE COWHERD FELL TO THE GROUND UNCONSCIOUS.

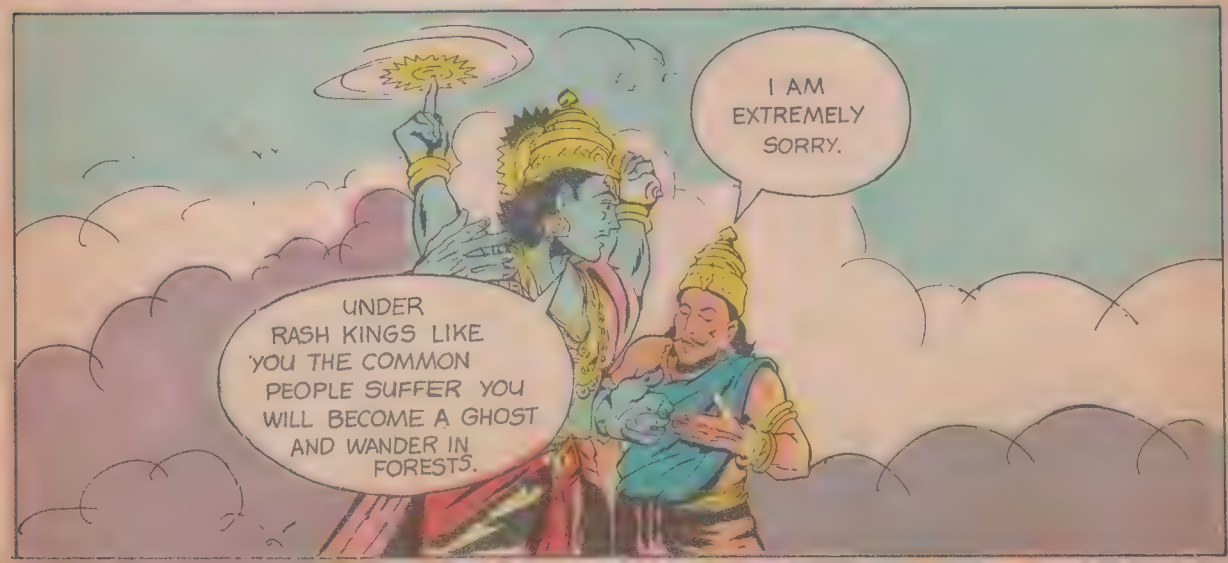
THE COW RAN TOWARDS THE PALACE...
...AND WENT STRAIGHT TO THE KING, AGITATED AND WITH TEAR-FILLED EYES.
THE KING WAS SURPRISED AT IT'S BEHAVIOUR...
... BUT SOON UNDERSTOOD THAT IT WANTED HIM TO FOLLOW IT.
THE KING FOLLOWED THE COW...
...THAT BROUGHT HIM TO THE ANT-HILL, WHERE THE COWHERD LAY SPRAWLED ON THE GROUND.

WHO HAS KILLED MY SERVANT? COME OUT AND FACE THE CONSEQUENCE!


VISHNU, SITTING UNDER A TREE NEARBY, CAME OUT TO MEET HIM.
I AM THE CULPRIT, O KING!


THE KING WAS SHOCKED UPON SEEING VISHNU.
A BEING OF SUCH GLORY!


WHO ARE YOU? AND HOW DID YOU INJURE YOUR HEAD? AND WHY DID YOU HARM MY COWHERD?
YOUR MAN TRIED TO KILL THE COW, BUT WHILE SAVING IT, THE AXE STRUCK MY FOREHEAD.


I AM EXTREMELY SORRY.
UNDER RASH KINGS LIKE YOU THE COMMON PEOPLE SUFFER YOU WILL BECOME A GHOST AND WANDER IN FORESTS.

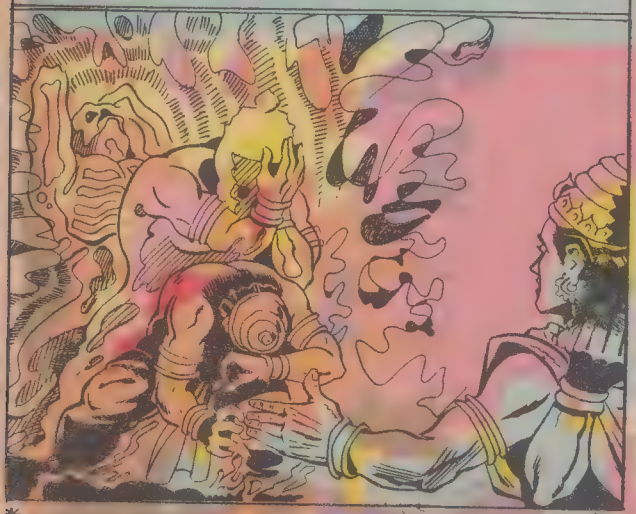
THE KING RECOGNISED THE PERSON TO BE NONE OTHER THAN THE GOD VISHNU HIMSELF.

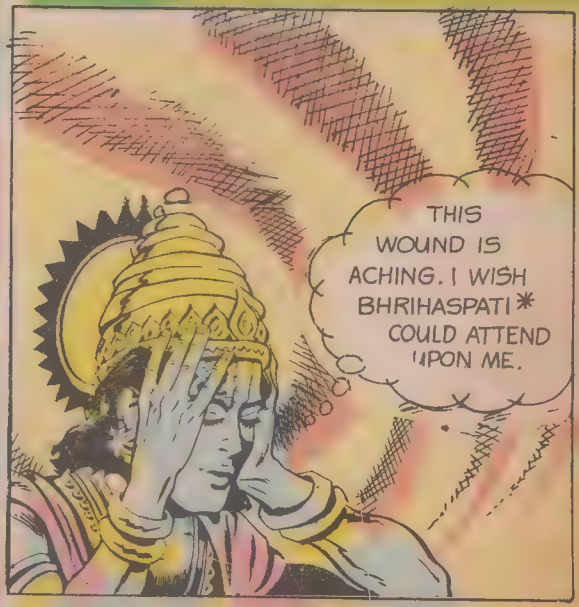
YOUR FORGIVENESS, MY LORD. PLEASE CANCEL YOUR CURSE.

YOUR GOOD DEEDS BROUGHT YOU INTO MY PRESENCE, BUT WHAT I HAVE JUST SPOKEN WILL COME TO PASS.

BUT AFTER WANDERING IN THE FORM OF A GHOST, YOU SHALL AGAIN TAKE BIRTH AS A KING AND HAVE THE GODDESS LAKSHMI FOR A DAUGHTER WHOM I SHALL MARRY.

AS ORDAINED, THE KING SUDDENLY TURNED INTO A GHOST.





* THE PRECEPTOR OF THE DEVAS

* THE BOAR-AVATAR OF VISHNU

VISHNU SMILED.

PERHAPS UNTIL THE END OF THIS KALIYUGA, OR MORE.

THAT, FOR MANKIND, WOULD BE SUCCOUR INDEED. BUT MY LORD, ARE YOU NOT AWARE THAT THIS PLACE IS CALLED VARAHA-BHOOMI?

VARAHA WANTED LORD VISHNU TO PAY FOR HIS STAY.

WHEN LAKSHMI LEFT ME, I LOST EVERYTHING. HOW THEN CAN I PAY YOU?

LORD VARAHA WAS AWARE OF THE EVENTS TO COME.

LORD, PLEASE AGREE TO GIFT ME THE FIRST OF THE PRAYERS AND OFFERINGS OF YOUR DEVOTEES.

CERTAINLY.

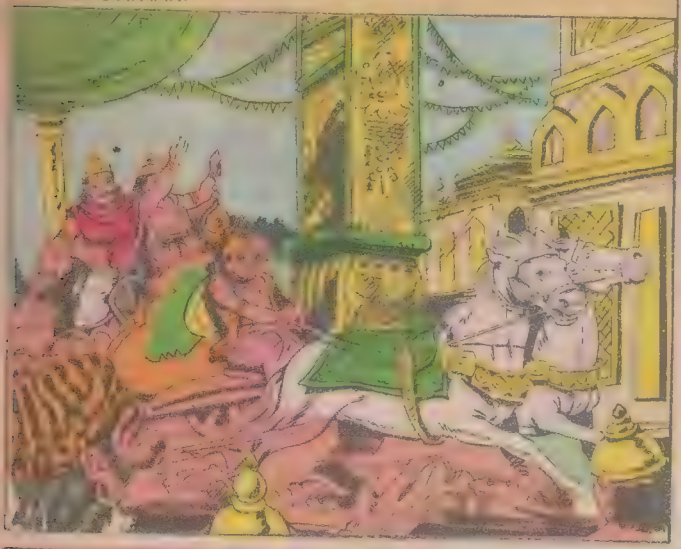
THEREUPON LORD VARAHA SUMMONED VAKULAMALIKA.*

MOTHER, PLEASE ATTEND UPON VISHNU, WHO IS WOUNDED.

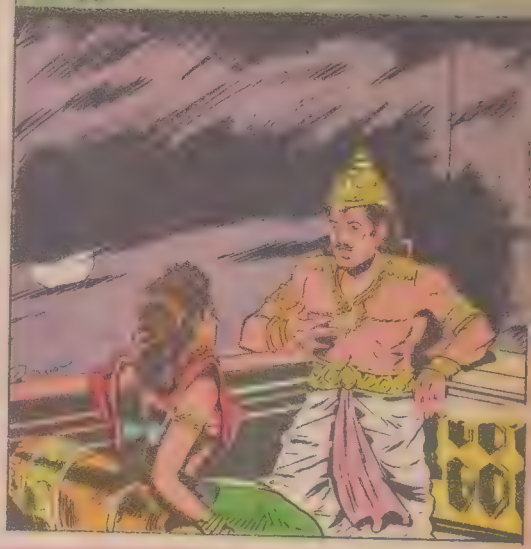
VAKULAMALIKA ACCOMPANIED VISHNU, KNOWING WELL THAT HE WAS NONE OTHER THAN LORD KRISHNA.

* YASHODA IN PREVIOUS BIRTH, WHEN VISHNU TOOK KRISHNA-AVATARA

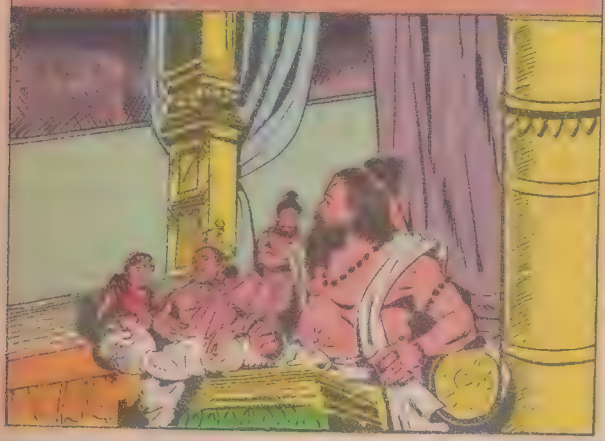
AS TIME PASSED, THE DECCAN PLATEAU PRO[illegible]ERED UNDER THE CHOLA KINGS, AKASHRAJ AND THONDAMAN.



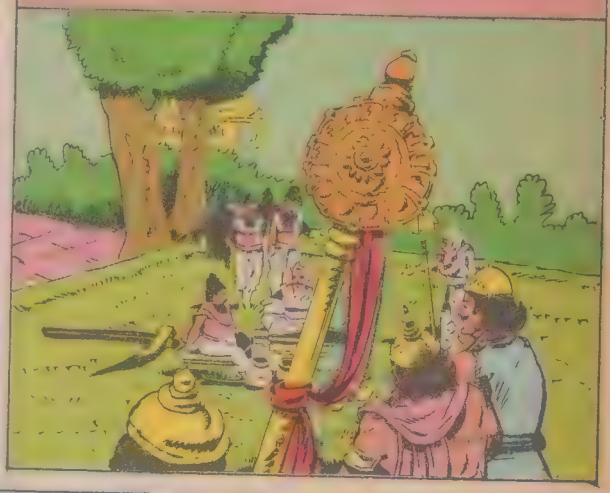
KING AKASHRAJ HAD A [illegible] WIFE DHARINIDEVI, BUT [illegible] CHILD.



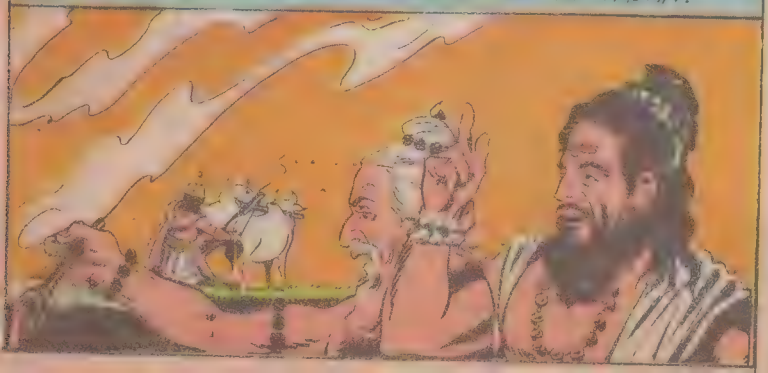
UPON THE ADVICE OF PRIESTS AND ASTROLOGERS THE KING DECIDED TO PERFORM A YAJNA FOR BEGETTING A CHILD.



PRIESTS OF RENOWN ASSEMBLED TO PERFORM THE YAJNA.



AS THE PRIESTS CHANTED THE 'MANTRAS', THE KING PLOUGHED THE LAND AS REQUIRED BY THE YAJNA.

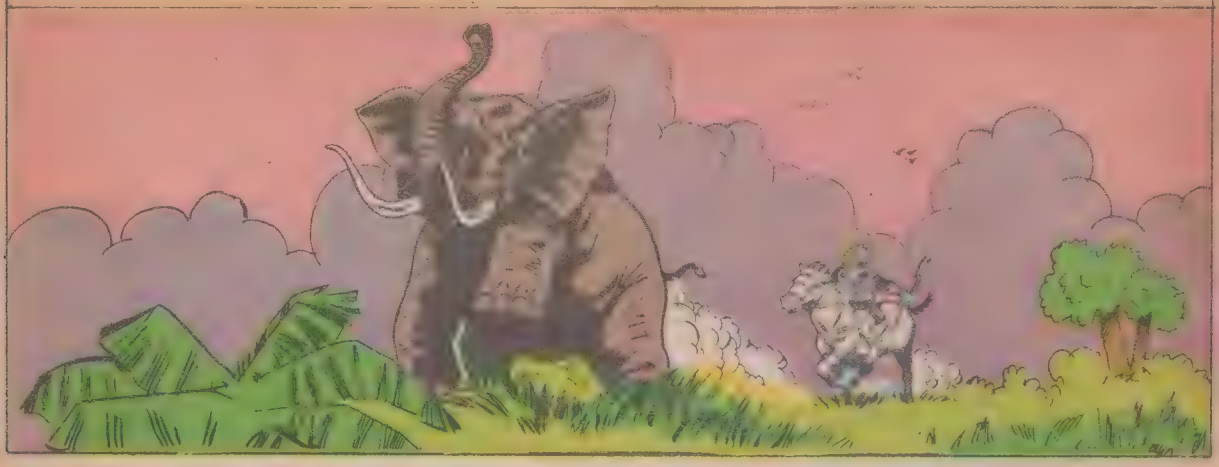


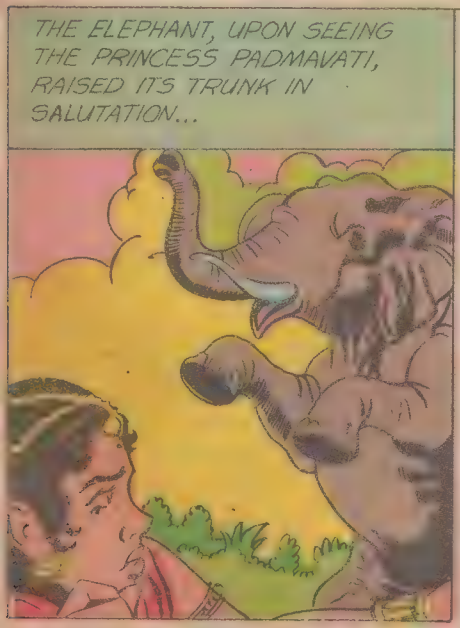
AFTER A FEW ROUNDS, THE PLOUGH STRUCK AN OBJECT...

* DAUGHTER OF KING JANAKA AND WIFE OF SRI RAMA

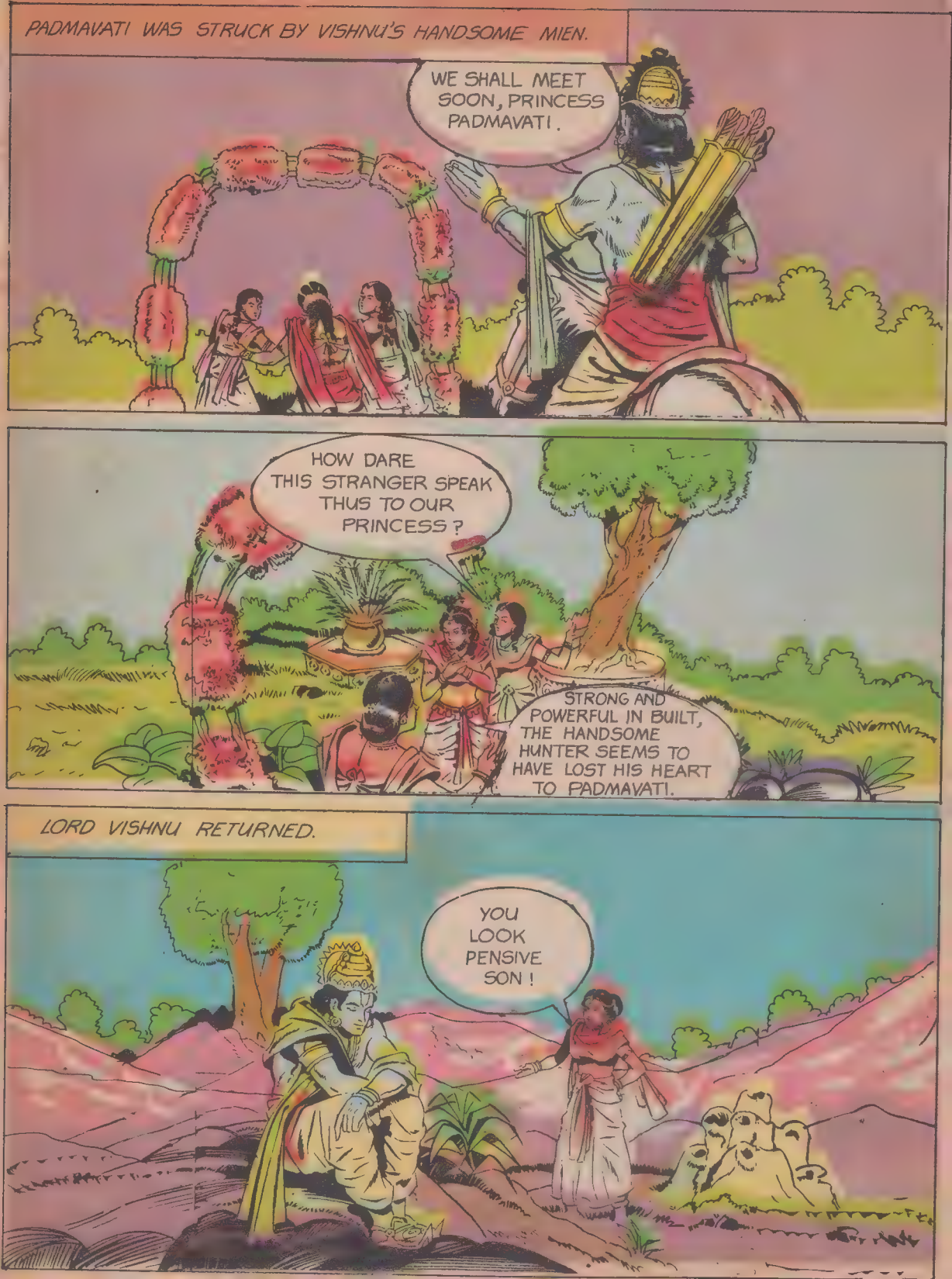
THE TWO CHILDREN GREW TOGETHER...
... INTO A HANDSOME PAIR.
PADMAVATI GREW TO BE A LOVELY PRINCESS.
ONE DAY; VISHNU WENT OUT TO HUNT, ON A HORSE BROUGHT BY GARUDA.
AFTER GALLOPING FOR SOME DISTANCE...
... HE SAW A WILD ELEPHANT TO WHOM HE GAVE CHASE.

THE ELEPHANT RAN FASTER THAN USUAL FOR ITS KIND, MAKING AN INTERESTING CHASE.





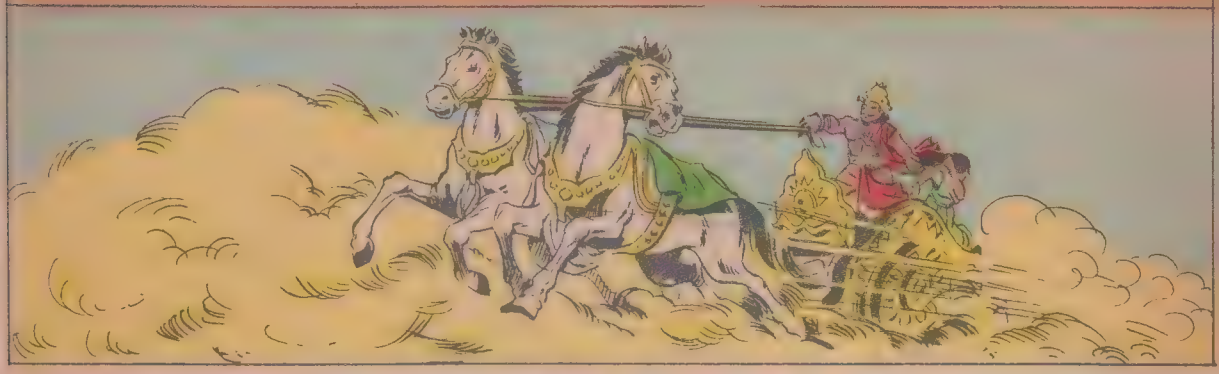
LORD VISHNU, WHO HAD WITNESSED ALL, ABANDONED HIS CHASE.
NOBLE LADY, WHO ARE YOU?
I AM PADMAVATI, DAUGHTER OF THE CHOLA KING AKASHRAJ. AND YOU?
I AM A DESCENDANT OF THE MOON DYNASTY, JUST LIKE THE CHOLAS.
BY NOW PADMAVATI'S FRIENDS HAD RETURNED TO THE SPOT.

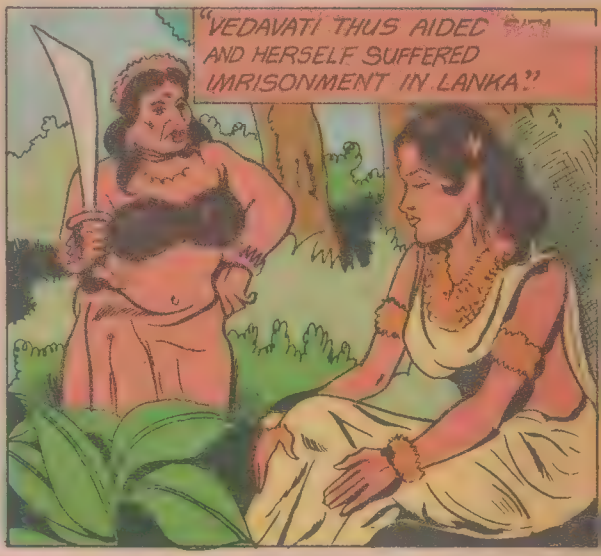

PADMAVATI WAS STRUCK BY VISHNU'S HANDSOME MIEN.
WE SHALL MEET SOON, PRINCESS PADMAVATI.
HOW DARE THIS STRANGER SPEAK THUS TO OUR PRINCESS?
STRONG AND POWERFUL IN BUILT, THE HANDSOME HUNTER SEEMS TO HAVE LOST HIS HEART TO PADMAVATI.
LORD VISHNU RETURNED.
YOU LOOK PENSIVE SON!

AFTER BEING PERSISTENTLY QUESTIONED BY VAKULAMALIKA, VISHNU TOLD HER ABOUT HIS ENCOUNTER WITH PADMAVATI.
HOW CAN YOU ADORE AN ORDINARY PRINCESS?
NO MOTHER PADMAVATI IS NO ORDINARY BEING.
MOTHER, I WILL TELL YOU THE STORY OF PADMAVATI'S PREVIOUS BIRTH.
"IN HER LAST BIRTH PADMAVATI WAS THE DAUGHTER OF A SAGE NAMED KUSATHWAJA."
"SHE WAS AN INCARNATION OF GODDESS LAKSHMI, WHO TOOK THE FORM OF A CHILD BY THE CHANTING OF VEDIC MANTRAS BY THE GREAT RISHI."

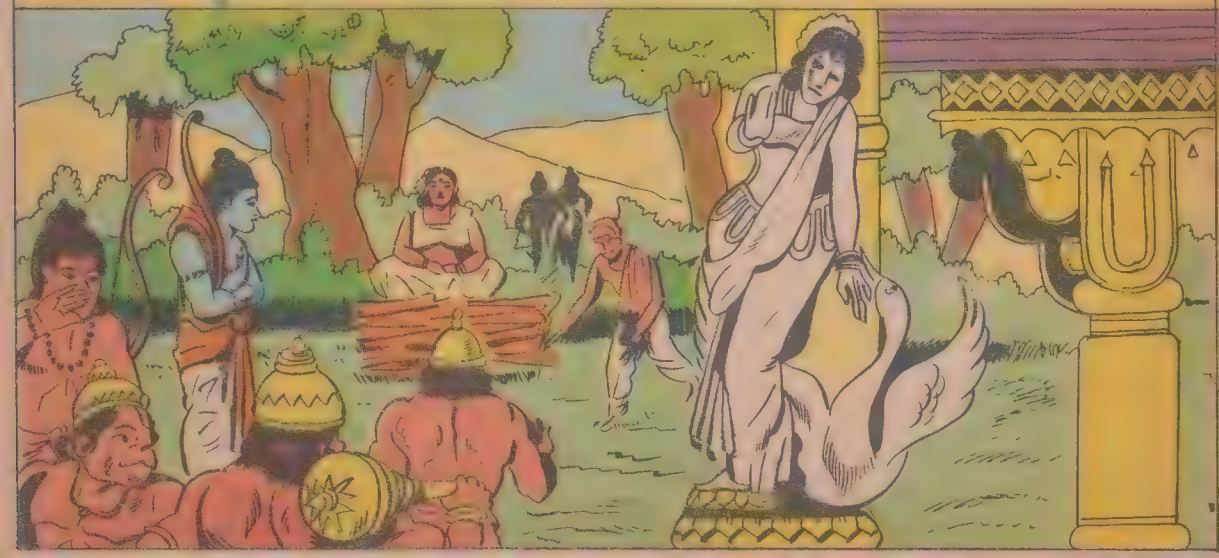
"HENCE SHE WAS CALLED VEDAVATI."
"SHE WANTED TO MARRY LORD VISHNU, AND ON HER FATHER'S ADVICE, SHE REPAIRED TO THE HIMALAYAS TO UNDERGO AUSTERITIES FOR THE PURPOSE."
"RAVANA, THE KING OF LANKA, SAW HER ONCE AND WAS CAPTIVATED BY HER CHARM."
"HE WANTED TO FORCE HER INTO MARRYING HIM, WHICH SHE RESISTED BY LEAPING INTO THE FIRE."
"THE FIRE-GOD, AGNI, SAVED HER AND KEPT PADMAVATI WITH HIS WIFE."

"LATER WHEN RAVANA CARRIED AWAY SITA, MY WIFE, IN MY INCARNATION AS RAMA..."





"WHEN RAMA RESCUED SITA FROM RAVANA, HE ASKED HER TO UNDERGO A FIRE-TEST TO PROVE HER PURITY."



"SITA, THAT IS VEDAVATI, ENTERED FIRE, BUT THE FIRE-GOD IMMEDIATELY CAME OUT WITH THE REAL SITA."
"RAMA WAS SURPRISED TO SEE TWO SITAS, BUT THE FIRE-GOD EXPLAINED THE EPISODE OF VEDAVATI."
"THEN RAMA GRANTED VEDAVATI A BOON THAT WHEN HE TOOK HIS INCARNATION AS SRINIVASA, SHE WOULD BE BORN AS PADMAVATI TO THE CHOLA KING AKASHRAJ, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE MARRIED."

AFTER THE TALE OF PADMAVATI'S PREVIOUS BIRTH—

HENCE MOTHER, I WILL MARRY PADMAVATI.

I WILL HELP YOU.

AFTER A FEW DAYS, VAKULAMALIKA SOUGHT AUDIENCE WITH THE QUEEN.

WELCOME, NOBLE LADY.

PLEASE HONOUR ME BY ACCEPTING A SMALL GIFT.

VAKULAMALIKA PRESENTED THE QUEEN AN IVORY PLATE FULL OF GEMS AND PRECIOUS STONES.

I WISH YOUR DAUGHTER PADMAVATI TO BE MY SON SRINIVASA'S WIFE.

THE QUEEN APPROACHED THE KING.

THE KING, UPON BEING TOLD ABOUT THE STRANGE MARRIGE PROPOSAL, SOUGHT THE GREAT RISHI SUKA'S ADVICE

THE GREAT SAGE SUKA WAS AWARE OF LORD VISHNU'S ABODE AT THE SESHAADRI HILLS. (TIRUMALA)

GLORY BE, FOR LORD SRI-NIVASA HAS CHOOSEN TO BE YOUR SON-IN-LAW.

THE KING WAS HAPPY AND ORDERED THAT ARRANGE-MENTS BE MADE FOR THE BETROTHAL.

THE WEDDING PREPARATIONS BEGAN IN FULL SWING AT THE PALACE.

AT THE HILLS, BRAHMA, SHIVA AND THE OTHER GODS ASSEMBLED TO ACCOMPANY VISHNU'S WEDDING ENTOURAGE.

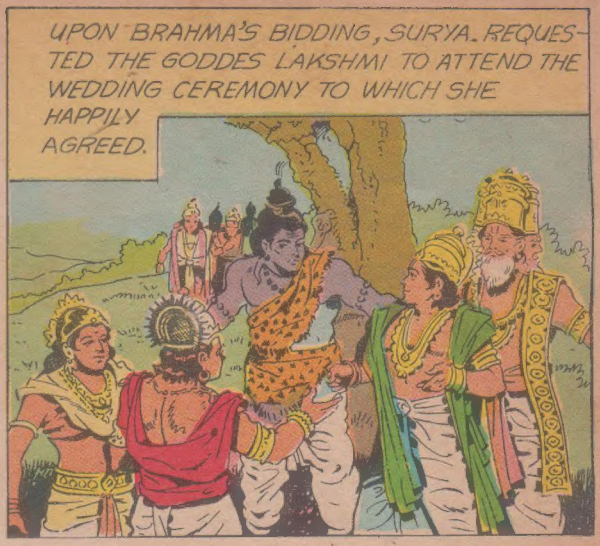
VISHNU SUMMONED KUBERA.

YOU KNOW WITH LAKSHMI GONE, I'VE LOST ALL WEALTH. SO I NEED YOUR HELP.

O GOD OF GODS, MY HELP YOU SAY! ALL THAT I HAVE IS YOURS.

NO KUBERA, WHEN I HAVE CHOOSEN TO DWELL ON THESE HILLS, I SHOULD BE LIKE OTHERS WHO LIVE ON EARTH.

GIVE ME A LOAN. I'LL REPAY IT WITH INTEREST.
AS YOU WISH, MY LORD.


UPON BRAHMA'S BIDDING, SURYA REQUESTED THE GODDES LAKSHMI TO ATTEND THE WEDDING CEREMONY TO WHICH SHE HAPPILY AGREED.

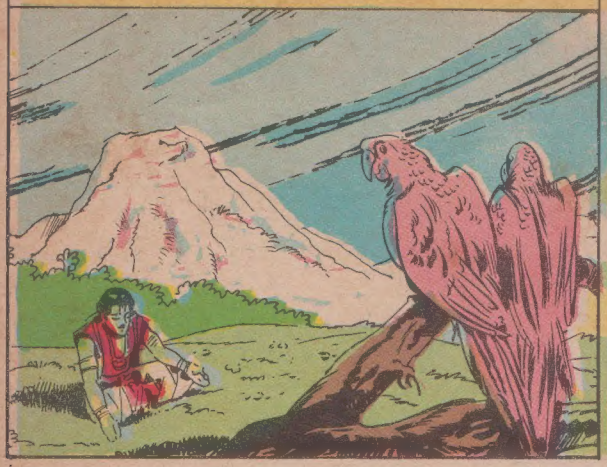
THE GREAT PROCESSION WAS RECEIVED AT NARAYANAPURAM BY KING AKASHRAJ...

...AND THE WEDDING WAS PERFORMED WITH GREAT FESTIVITY.

AFTER THEIR MARRIAGE VISHNU AND PADMAVATI LIVED HAPPILY

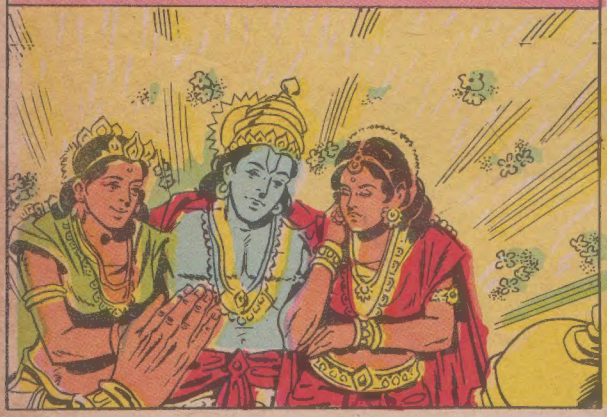
...BUT THE THOUGHT OF LAKSHMI TROUBLED VISHNU ALL THE TIME.

VISHNU DECIDED TO PERFORM A SEVERE PENANCE TO GET HER BACK...



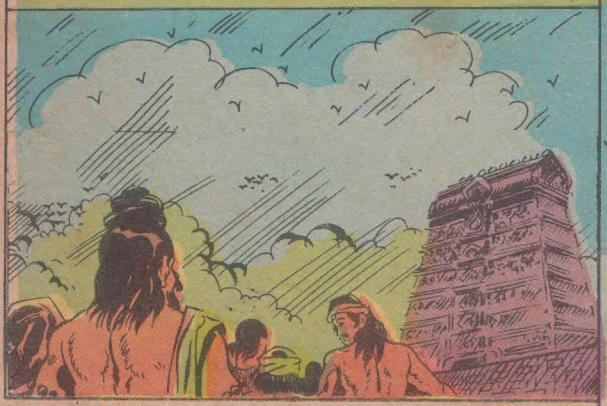
...AND AFTER BRAHMA AND OTHER GODS INTERVENED, LAKSHMI AGREED TO RETURN TO HER LORD.

LAKSHMI JOINED VISHNU AND PADMAVATI, AND ALL THE GODS SHOWERED BLESSINGS UPON THEM.

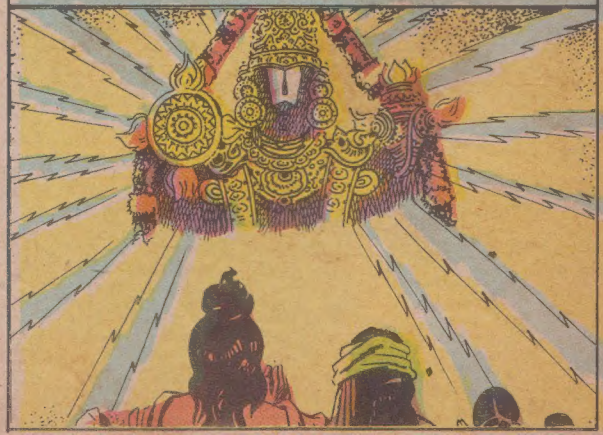


ON THE VERY SITE, A GREAT TEMPLE WAS BUILT BY THE CHOLA KING THONDAMAN...

...WHERE THE DEVOUT FROM ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD WOULD FLOCK TO HAVE A GLIMPSE OF THE IMAGE OF THE SUPREME LORD...



...WHO HAD, IN HIS BENEVOLENCE, COME DOWN TO EARTH TO HALLOW THIS SPOT, THE SESHAADRI HILLS FOR THE FAITHFUL.



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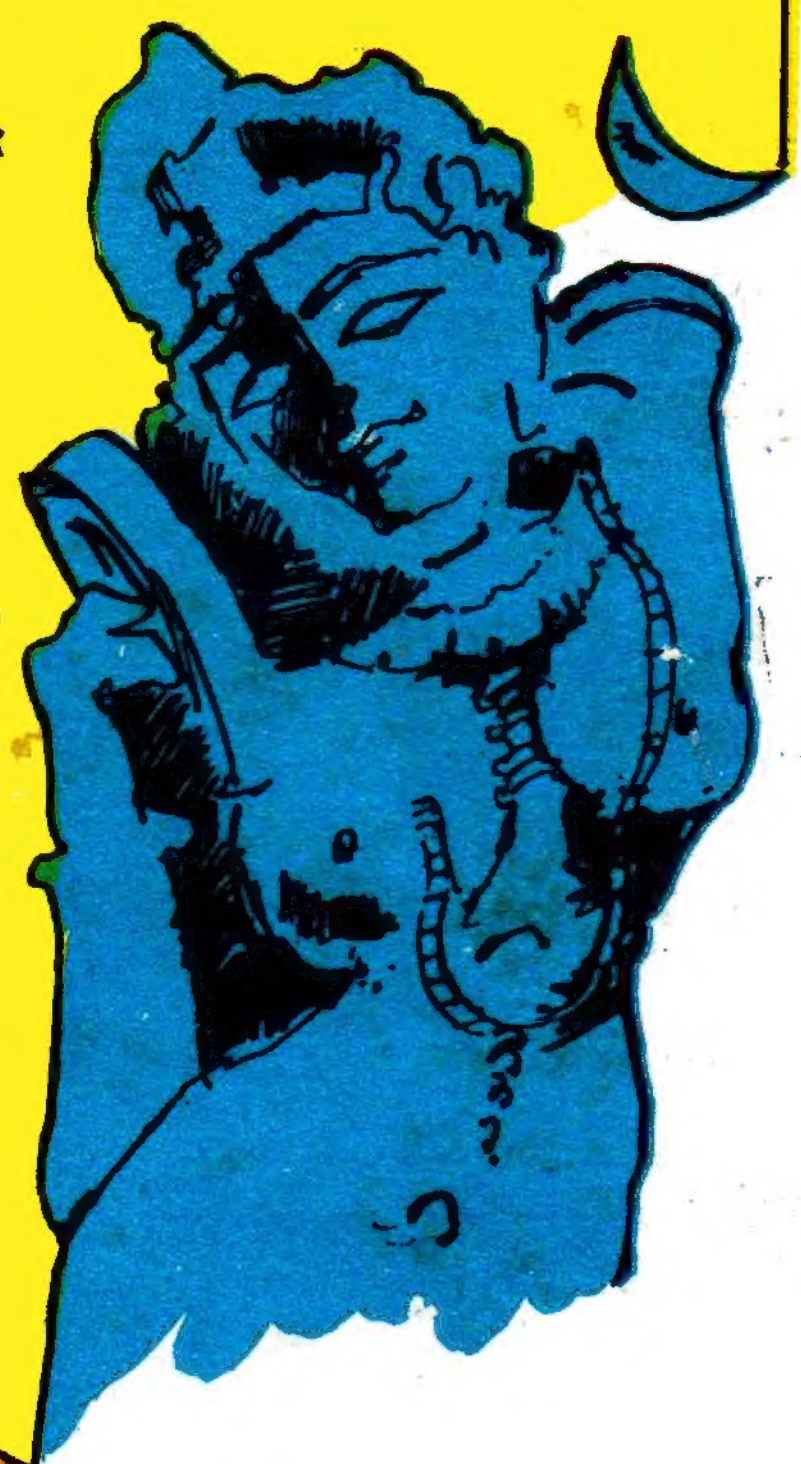

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